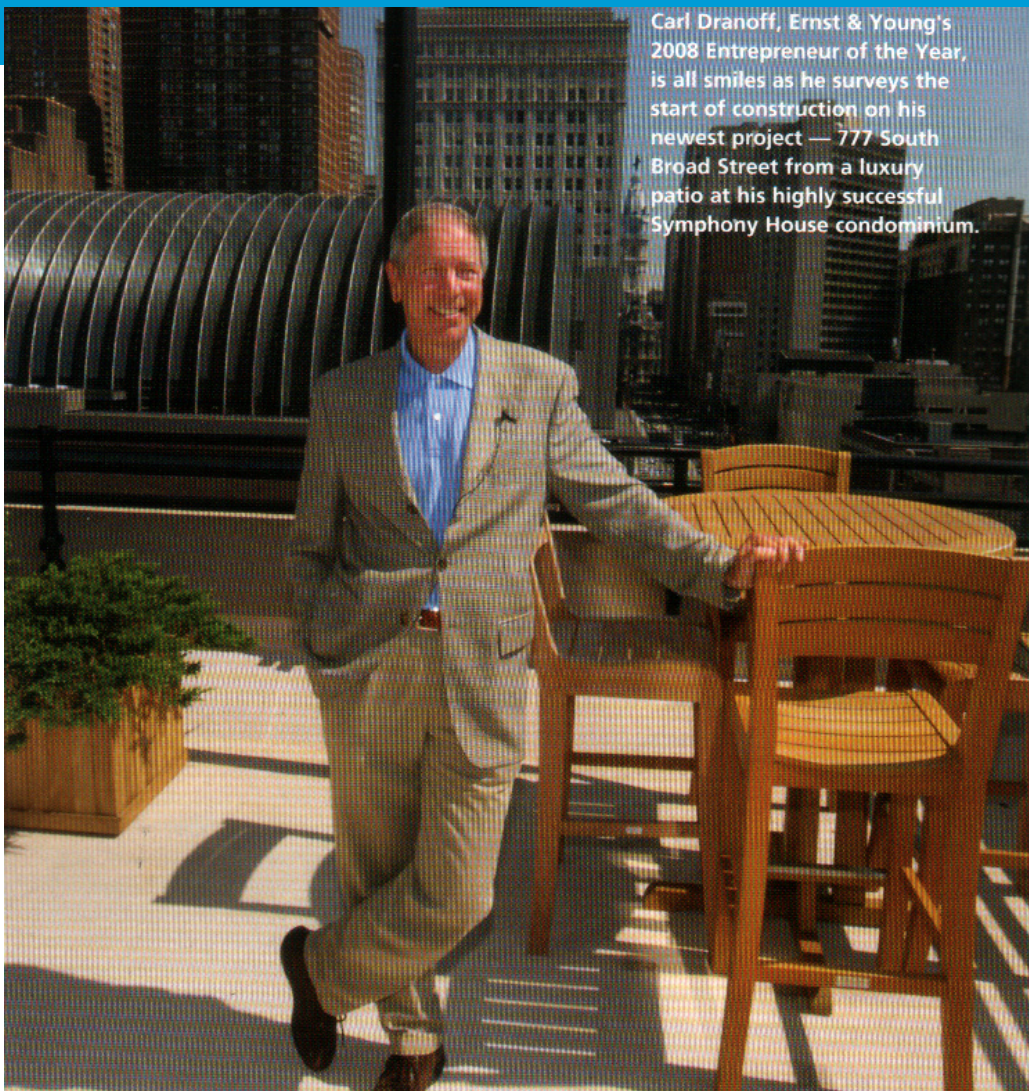


GREATERT PHILADELPHIA

> trendsetter



Carl Dranoff, Ernst & Young's 2008 Entrepreneur of the Year, is all smiles as he surveys the start of construction on his newest project — 777 South Broad Street from a luxury patio at his highly successful Symphony House condominium.

The Maestro of the Avenue of the Arts Spins Straw Into Gold

BY GREG BYRNES

FOR MORE THAN 30 years, Carl Dranoff has been successfully spinning straw into gold—buying old derelict buildings in unloved neighborhoods and restoring the dowagers into residential grande dames that often play the lead role in revitalizing their neighborhoods.

Now, at 60, the local and nationally recognized King of Rehabs is changing his playbook—

developing “ground up new residencies” that will focus on incorporating smart design, environmentally friendly and energy efficient construction materials, and, as always, provide renters and buyers with great places to live.

Competitive, visionary, resilient, insightful, and driven are some adjectives that real estate colleagues use to describe this year's win-

ner of the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award. Scores of awards and accolades from prestigious organizations, public officials, neighborhood organizations and journalists have been bestowed on the Drexel civil engineer and Harvard MBA graduate since he launched Dranoff Properties 10 years ago. Most observers attribute his success to his remarkable ability to determine and then help transform urban areas ripe from redevelopment.

Today, Dranoff's warehouse-sized offices at the Left Bank in University City are strewn with architectural renderings and models of projects that will transform and revitalize neighborhoods in Camden, Philadelphia, Ardmore and Newark, New Jersey (see sidebar for a roster of Dranoff's projects).

When asked to define his single greatest achievement, Dranoff names two—the Victor in Camden and Symphony House, a luxury high-rise condominium on South Broad Street in Center City. “In my heart, they're tied for first.”

The Victor, which once served as the cabinet factory for the Victor Talking Machine Co., was without a doubt the toughest project for Dranoff to finance and get built. He spent two “incredibly frustrating” years pitching the project to the investment community without success. “They would look at the boarded building—ransacked and vandalized, look at the neighborhood and read headline's about Camden's crime rate.”

Rejected by the private sector, he turned to two public agencies: the Delaware River Port Authority and the Casino Reinvestment Authority for financial assistance to help kick start the project. He negotiated a favorable 30-year tax agreement with the City of Camden “that took some risk out of the deal” so private lenders would finally be willing to take a chance on the project. They did, and the rest was history.

“I'm proud that we brought life to a neighborhood and a city that had been written off,” said Dranoff. The conversion of the former RCA Victor factory into 341 luxury loft apartments in 2003 has since served as a catalyst for the start of a \$500 million revitalization of Camden's waterfront.

The 32-story Symphony House was a differ-

Most observers attribute his success to his remarkable ability to determine and then help transform urban areas ripe for redevelopment.

ent kind of challenge, noted Dranoff. “It was a real gamble to put a high-rise condo at Broad and Pine. First, no one had built one that wasn’t on or overlooking Rittenhouse Square. Second, my team and I had no experience doing new high-rise construction,” he said.

“The reason I’m so proud of it is the fact that Symphony House, now that it is completed, has become a shining start of success in a soft real estate market. Several other developers announced new condo projects way before us, but we were the first to complete our building (in 30 months),” he said. “Our sales have been fantastic. We have sold and conveyed 85% of our units—more than covering all our bills.”

Dranoff said his team succeeded because they know how to build housing. Dranoff, sounding just a bit like “The Donald,” ticks off a list of the building’s superlative amenities: a lobby that rivals that of the Four Seasons, unparalleled city views, the Suzanne Roberts Theatre (“the only high-rise besides the Time Warner Center in New York that has incorporated a theatre into its structure”), the city’s largest indoor lap pool, a fitness center replete with massage rooms, high ceilings, dining salons, a catering kitchen, wine bars and wine storage units, self parking for residents (“residents really prefer it to valet”).

Dranoff and his wife Roberta, who recently became grandparents, will soon be leaving their suburban Main Line mansion and taking ownership of one of the condo’s “ultra luxurious” penthouses. “We started our life together living on Locust Street,” said Dranoff, who holds an honorary doctorate from Drexel. “Then I had a mid-life crises—I had to build a house in the Main Line. Now, we, like so many suburbanites, are returning to the city for its sizzle and amenities.”

Dranoff waxes enthusiastic about the views from his floor to ceiling window: “I’ll be able to view the daily progress on my newest project — 777 South Broad, just three blocks south of Symphony House. It will be the city’s first LEED (green) certified multifamily mixed-use building that will feature 146 luxury lofts and retail along the Avenue of the Arts, which has become Philadelphia’s entertainment and dining district.”

Thanks to Dranoff Properties and its maestro, the Avenue of the Arts is more than a collection of restaurants, theaters and symphony halls. It’s now home to a growing number of residents. “No street is great without people living on it,” said the visionary developer. “That’s what we bring to the table.” <

THE DRANOFF PORTFOLIO OF FINE PROPERTIES INCLUDES:

- **SYMPHONY HOUSE**, a 163-unit ground-up luxury condominium at Broad and Pine Streets in Center City Philadelphia.
- **VENICE LOFTS**, 128 ultra-luxurious mid-rise flats and townhomes set in historic context along Philadelphia’s Schuylkill River waterfront, and overlooking the Manayunk Canal.
- **THE VICTOR**, an adaptive reuse of the historic RCA Victor cabinet factory, on Camden’s Waterfront, transformed into 34 luxury loft rental apartments that overlook Philadelphia’s skyline and the Delaware River.
- **THE LEFT BANK**, a 282-unit luxury loft apartment community that is the single largest residential historic rehabilitation project in Pennsylvania history.
- **LOCUST ON THE PARK**, a former printing plant that has been transformed into a 152 luxury apartments overlooking a soon-to-be-reclaimed Schuylkill River and the Schuylkill River Park.
- **WORLD CAFE LIVE**, a former plumbing supply warehouse that was converted into a world-class performance hall, bistro, and radio station.

UPCOMING PROJECTS INCLUDE:

- **777 SOUTH BROAD**, a mix of luxury apartments over high-end retail on the south end of the Avenue of the Arts.
- **RADIO LOFTS**, a first condominium project on Camden’s Waterfront.
- **TWO CENTER STREET**, a mixed-use residential and retail project adjacent to the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark, N.J.
- **ARDMORE STATION**, a \$150 million revitalization of the business district and transit center in Ardmore, Pa.